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Duck, Smokers: Cigarette vs. Cancer Row Is On Again

Some scientists claim smoking causes disease; some say it doesn't; others just aren't sure

By WILLIAM MILLER, Courier-Journal Staff Writer

GET set for another national Great Debate.

This time the battlelines are being drawn to settle an old squabble—do or don't cigarettes cause lung cancer?

And before the smoke settles, it should be quite a fracas with America's estimated 70,000,000 cigarette smokers caught in the bewildering middle.

Some scientists say cigarettes are the villain responsible for lung cancer and a rash of other ailments. Not so, say others, who blame the anti-cigarette forces for distorting statistics.

And quite a few reputable scientists and doctors frankly admit that they just are not sure.

Started In 1560

Actually, it all started back in 1560 when Jean Nicot, then French ambassador to Portugal, reported mysterious curative powers in a remarkable new American Indian herb, then smoked in pipes.

In appreciation for this find, the herb was named in his honor—Nicotiana tabacum. It wasn't long, however, until an anti-tobacco group arose to condemn smoking as a bad habit responsible for all sorts of ailments.

Today, 402 years later, the argument rages on.

The controversy has gathered new steam in recent weeks. In England, cigarettes have been officially condemned. And a new blast has been fired by the American Cancer Society in the July issue of the respected Scientific American.

Both sides boast an impressive line-up of supporters. Both present convincing arguments. The scorecard is something like this:

Arch-enemy of the cigarette in this country is the American Cancer Society. Its latest ally is the Royal College of Physicians in London who flatly blamed smoking for several diseases, particularly lung cancer, in an official report this year.

In the other corner, the pro-cigarette team is led by the Tobacco Industry Research Committee. Most recent support for this side comes from an unlikely source, Hungarian cancer specialist Dr. Joseph Balo, who expressed doubt at a recent scientific institute in Moscow that there is a connection between cigarettes and lung cancer.

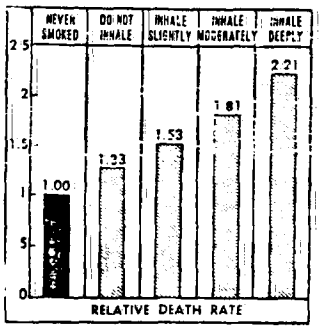
This fight involves far more than a basic scientific argument or a simple decision of whether people should smoke.

Tobacco is big business. It is also little business and farm business on a massive, nationwide scale. At the minimum, it is an $8,000,000,000 annual proposition.

Americans smoked an estimated 525,000,000,000 cigarettes last year, spending about $7,500,000,000 on tobacco products.

More than 800,000 farm families in 21 states grow tobacco, there are more than 700 tobacco factories in 32 states.

Seventeen million Americans depend on tobacco for all or part of their livelihood. More tobacco products pass over retail counters than any other item.



In the Hammond report on more than a million persons, this shows the degree of inhalation.

The federal, State and local return from tobacco taxes is more than $3,100,000,000.

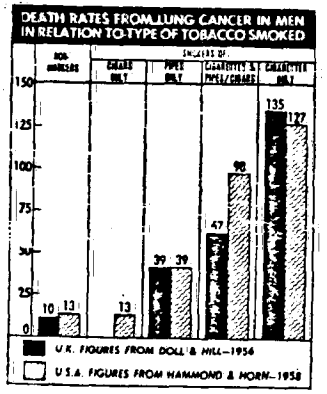
In Kentucky alone, 40 percent of the State's cash receipts from farm marketing comes from tobacco, according to Dr. Robert Rudd, professor of agricultural economics at the University of Kentucky.

About 170,000 Kentucky farm families grow burley tobacco—379,000,000 pounds on 213,058 acres last year. This year the crop will be about 17,800,000 pounds larger, adding nearly $12,000,000 to the income of Kentucky farmers if prices stay high.

Dr. Rudd puts the capital value of tobacco land in Kentucky at about $500,000,000. The State has 144,535 tobacco allotments valued at about $2,500 each.

And another 11,000 workers are employed in Kentucky tobacco factories, earning wages of more than $48,000,000 a year.

Kentuckians smoked about 355,000,000 packs of cigarettes in 1960 alone, paying about $12,200,000 in consumer taxes.



This chart from the Royal College of Physicians report shows death rates in U.S. and United Kingdom.

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Source: https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/ngyk0000

The economic factors are obvious: a decline in Americans' use of tobacco would cause serious repercussions.

The fight involves so much and so many that President John F. Kennedy —who didn't shy at taking on the steel industry or the American Medical Association—ducked a direct answer on cigarette smoking at a recent press conference. Instead, he called for a referee.

Named to the delicate task was Luther L. Terry, surgeon general of the United States Public Health Service. He expects to select a 12-man committee by mid-September, from all sides of the argument, to "study the impact of smoking upon health . . . not only with tobacco but all other factors which may be involved, such as air pollution, automobile exhausts, etc."

Terry expects the first phase of the investigation to be completed in about six months, culling the opinions of more than 150 scientists. Names will be withheld to avoid pressures. A second phase will run indefinitely.

Two other studies, one by the Council on Drugs of the American Medical Association and the other by the American Thoracic Society, will run concurrently but independently.

But if Terry's committee sticks to the schedule, the first official data should be due before next Spring. It might be a bombshell. Or it could be another scientifically styled hair-splitter, leaving the quarrel about where it is now—hanging.

The investigators face a mountain of facts, data, statistics and conflicting opinion. Here are summaries of the basic arguments:

2—Case Against Smoking

THE most devastating assault on smoking was made in a report of the Royal College of Physicians in London published earlier this year.

Its basic conclusions were:

1. "Death rates from lung cancer increase steeply with increasing consumption of cigarettes. Heavy cigarette smokers may have 30 times the death rate of non-smokers."

2. ". . . Cigarette smokers are much more affected than pipe or cigar smokers and those who had given up smoking at the start of the surveys had lower death rates than those who had continued to smoke."

3. "Cigarette smoking is a cause of lung cancer, and bronchitis, and probably contributes to the development of coronary heart disease and various other less-common diseases. It delays healing of gastric and duodenal ulcers. . . . The number of deaths caused by diseases associated with smoking is large."

4. "The chance of dying in the next 10 years for a man aged 35 who is a heavy cigarette smoker is 1 in 23 whereas the risk for a non-smoker is only 1 in 90. Only 15 percent (one in six) of men of this age who are non-smokers but 33 percent (one in three) of heavy smokers will die before the age 65. Not all this difference in expectation of life is attributable to smoking."

The report also considered various other possible causes which might be associated with lung cancer but concluded:

". . . None of them is found to contradict the conclusion that cigarette smoking is an important cause of lung cancer. If the habit ceased, the number of deaths caused by this disease should fall steeply in the course of time."

Decisive Government action in England was urged to curb the rising consumption of tobacco, especially by the young.

Actions Suggested

Among the suggested actions were: educate the public concerning smoking; prevent the sale of tobacco to children; restrict tobacco advertising and smoking in public places; increase cigarette taxes; inform purchasers of tar and nicotine content, and investigate the value of antismoking clinics.

Dr. E. Cuyler Hammond
Spearheads the attack

For those who can't or won't stop smoking, the report held out some hope that more efficient filters, modified tobaccos, longer cigarette stubs, or changing to pipe or cigars might reduce the harmful effects of smoking.

In the United States Dr. E. Cuyler Hammond, director of the Stastistical Research Section of the American Cancer Society, has spearheaded a decade-long attack on cigarettes. He has no doubts that they are harmful to health.

But he believes that many Americans lack the willpower or inclination to stop smoking.

'The Simplest Way . . .'

"After reviewing the evidence, the mildest statement I can make is that, in my opinion, the inhalation of tobacco smoke produces a number of very harmful effects and shortens the life span of human beings," he says.

"The simplest way to avoid these possible consequences is not to smoke at all. But one can avoid the most serious of them by smoking cigars or a pipe instead of cigarettes, provided that one does not inhale the smoke," he added.

In the meantime, he urges intensified research to determine the effects of various constituents of cigarette smoke and to find means of removing those that are harmful.

"Until this has been accomplished, it seems advisable to reduce the total tar and nicotine content of cigarette smoke by the means now available," he said.

Other private and official organizations have joined the attack.

In 1959 Surgeon General Leroy E. Burney implicated smoking "as the principal etiological factor in the increased incidence of lung cancer."

In April, 1962, Surgeon General Terry said: "The weight of scientific evidence . . . demonstrates that cigarette smoking is a major cause of the increase in cancer of the lung."

The American Heart Association finds a "statistical association between heavy cigarette smoking and mortality or morbidity from coronary heart disease."

The National Tuberculosis Association warns that "the risk of lung cancer increases with the number of cigarettes smoked," and state health commissioners in New York and California have declared smoking as at least an important causative factor in lung cancer.

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Source: https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/ngyk0000

3—Case For Smoking

THE TOBACCO Industry Research Committee has fought its battle along dignified, scientific lines.

Its basic argument is this:

We don't flatly claim that cigarette smoking is harmless, but the case linking cigarette smoking to lung cancer and other diseases has not been scientifically proved.

Our opponents have overplayed their arguments, based largely on statistics that can be distorted to prove almost anything.

There is significant evidence of other contributory factors in lung cancer accumulating from both statistical and experimental research, industry spokesmen say.

Some of these other possible factors may include: previous lung infections, air pollutants, genetic factors, stress, hormonal influences, viruses and diet.

The origin of lung cancer is a complex problem; the answers are yet to be definitely determined, the industry research committee contends.

Dr. Clarence C. Little, scientific director of the committee, raises several questions including:

1. Why haven't scientists succeeded in inducing lung cancer in animals by having them inhale tobacco smoke during their entire lifetimes? What about the possible role of viruses?

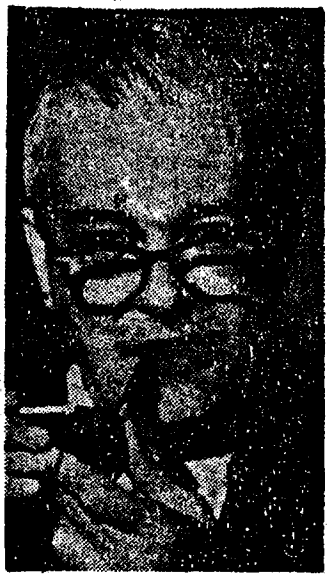
2. How much lung cancer results from previous lung damage from such bacterial diseases as tuberculosis and pneumonia?

3. If smoking is the cause, by what mechanism does this occur? Why do pathologists disagree on such basic questions as how much increase there has been in lung cancer?

"Might it be that the genetic, hormonal, emotional and other internal influences are the clues to differences in health risks?" Dr. Little asks.

To pursue these answers the tobacco committee, formed in 1954 by manufacturers, growers and warehousemen, has already spent about $6,000,000 on research. Some of the nation's most distinguished scientists are involved.

A short time after its formation, the committee invited doctors and scientists known for their work in cancer, heart disease and other ailments to serve on a scientific advisory board. This board, composed now of nine scientists who retain their respective institutional affiliations, has sole responsibility for the research program. The board does not conduct any research, nor does the committee.



Dr. Clarence C. Little
Raises several questions

The research is done by independent scientists who apply to the board for grants-in-aid. Scientists receiving grants are assured complete scientific freedom in conducting their research. These scientists are responsible for disclosing their findings through medical and scientific organizations and publications.

'Merely A Review'

Dr. Little discounts the Royal College of Physicians' report as "merely a review and evaluation of certain pre-existing data already published and considered. . . . The scientific situation regarding what is known and what is not known about lung cancer and other diseases under consideration remains as it was before the Royal College report.

"Much research reported in the past few years has tended to weaken, rather than to support, the hypothesis that cigarette smoking is a causative factor in lung cancer," Dr. Little said.

What is the possible outcome of this Great Debate? What happens if the surgeon general's committee decides against cigarettes and bombshells the American public with an anti-cigarette announcement?

Possible, Not Probable

Most observers doubt that it will ever come to that. Too much is involved. In England the problem is mainly one of cigarette consumption. The problem goes deeper here and involves massive, national economic factors.

In Kentucky, agricultural economists warn that a "cigarette depression" would cause dire consequences. Farmers might convert their land to other uses, but nothing would approach tobacco in cash returns.

But they don't think this will happen.

In the meantime, scientists feel that they are extremely close to breaking down some of the basic mystery surrounding cancer.

Chemists are convinced that, eventually, the harmful elements in cigarettes—if there are any—will be isolated. Once they are known, they probably can be neutralized.

In any event, most observers believe Americans will go on smoking cigarettes, danger or no danger. Or as one economic-investigator put it:

"We will always have the vast number of gamblers who will be willing to take a calculated risk. Tobacco is here to stay."

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Source: https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/ngyk0000